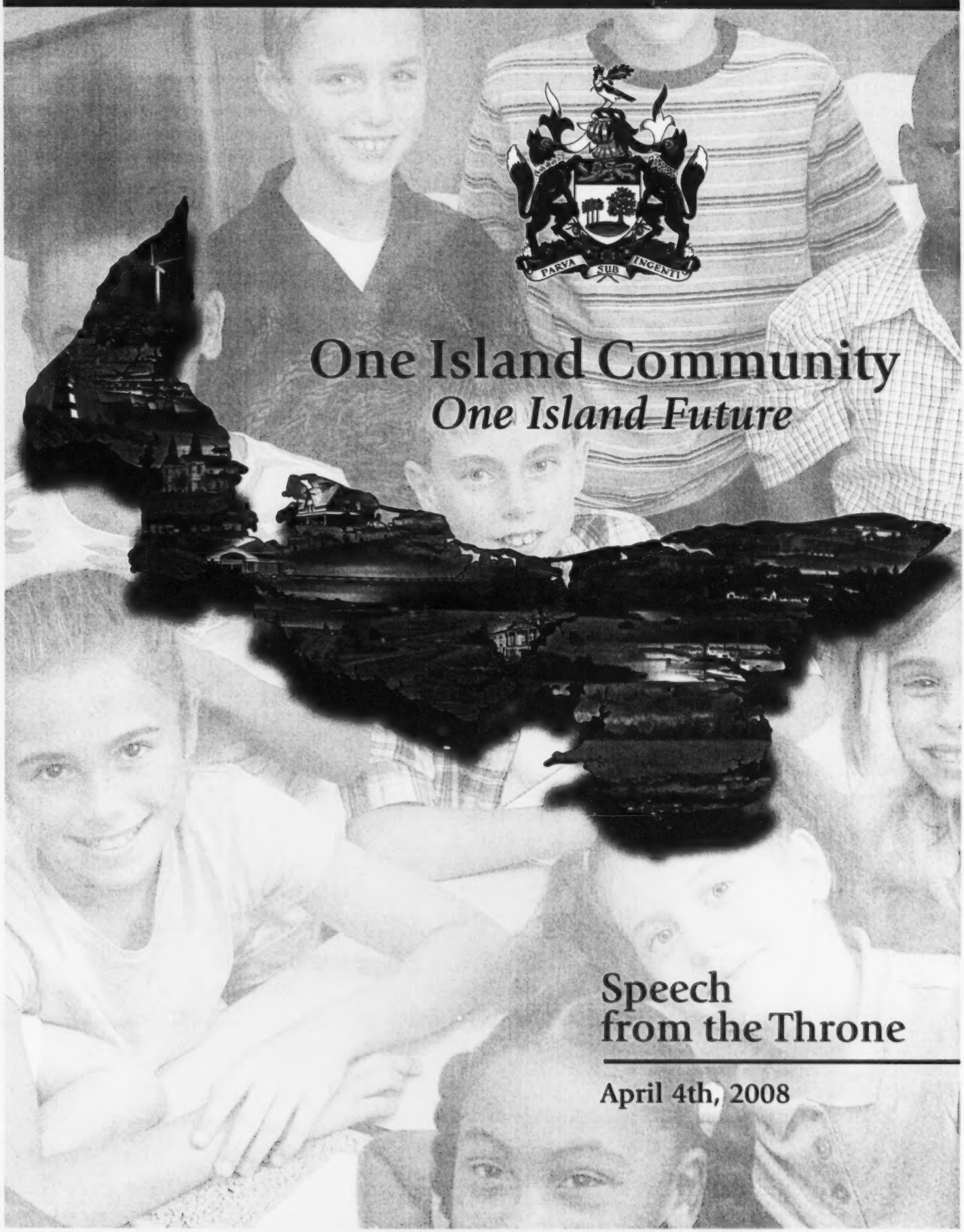


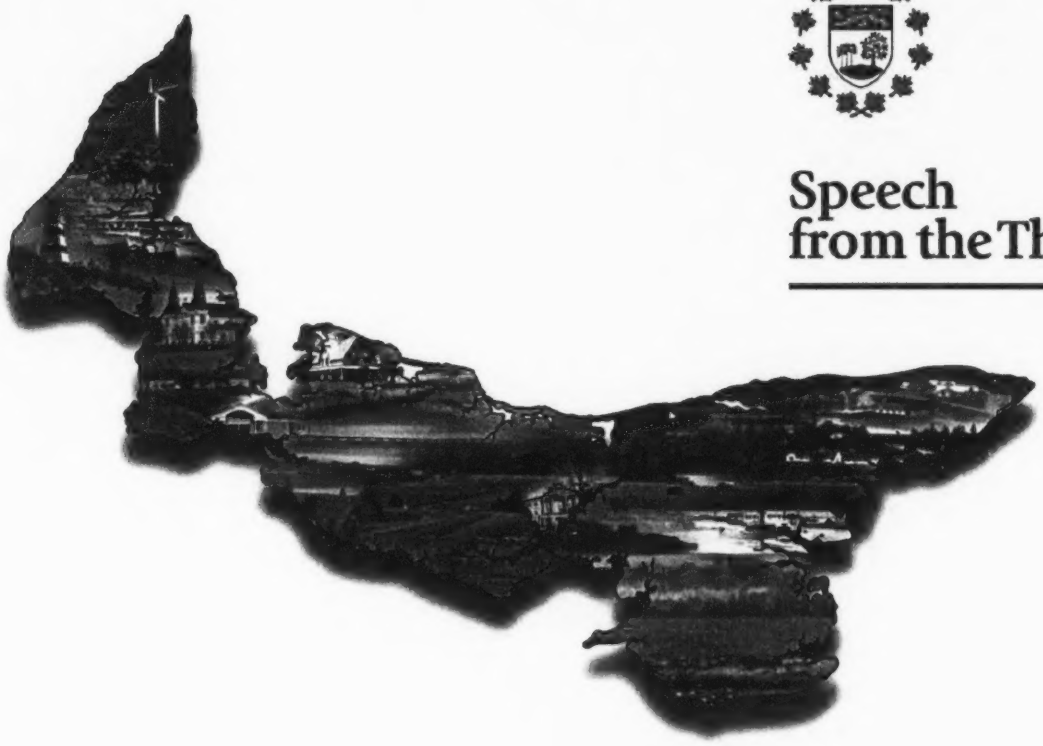
One Island Community
One Island Future

Speech from the Throne

April 4th, 2008

The Honourable
Barbara A. Hagerman
Lieutenant Governor
of Prince Edward Island

One Island Community
One Island Future



Speech from the Throne

2nd Session of the
63rd General Assembly
of Prince Edward Island

April 4th, 2008
at 3 p.m.

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly,

It is my privilege and honour, in the name of Her Majesty Elizabeth II, to welcome you to the 2nd Session of the 63rd General Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

On May 28, 2007, the people of Prince Edward Island voted for change. In response to their electoral wishes, I am honoured to present my Government's first Speech From the Throne outlining the direction we are taking, and our priorities and plans for the coming year.

Madame Speaker, we have much to be thankful for here on this little Island, so removed as we are from abject poverty and war, and the denial of civil liberties. Of course, peace and security are always gained at a great price, as our veterans will tell you, and my Government would be remiss at the beginning of this Legislative Session if it did not recognize, and pay tribute to, the courageous Islanders presently serving in Afghanistan and other parts of the world.

It is because of their extraordinary service and commitment that my Government enacted legislation in the Fall 2007 Session protecting the employment rights of returning veterans.

Madame Speaker, I especially want to extend a welcome this afternoon to those new immigrant families who have come to live here from the far reaches of our world. We are grateful they have chosen Prince Edward Island as their home. Over the broad stretch of history, most of us are newcomers to this place, and it is my sincere wish that we welcome new immigrants with friendship and generosity.

Speaking of friendship, Prince Edward Island is proud to be the host province of the 2009 Canada Summer Games. It will be the first time the Games take place across an entire province, and the president of the Host Society, Mr. Joseph Spriet, together with his future legion of volunteers, deserve our support and gratitude.

2009 Canada Summer Games

Adjusting to Change

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Prince Edward Island has come to another place in its long and illustrious development where a new compass track needs to be taken, where new challenges and opportunities need to be confronted, if our province is to continue to grow and prosper into the 21st century.

We were at a similar place in the early 1970s when a young Liberal Premier Alexander B. Campbell introduced fundamental reforms and changes to the social and economic framework of Prince Edward Island through a Comprehensive Development Plan.

My Government is not proposing another Comprehensive Development Plan, however our province has continued to change, and Government must adjust and keep pace with that change. There has been a steady population shift from rural to urban, mainly into the Charlottetown, Summerside and central Queens regions of the province. Moreover, a growing number of rural Islanders commute to work in either Summerside or Charlottetown.

It could be said that in 2008 here on the Island, rural has blurred into urban, while urban continues to bear small-town, rural sensibilities.

One Island Community: One Island Future

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

As we confront future challenges, my Government is calling upon Islanders to embrace a new social and economic reality, that increasingly we are one Island community with one Island future.

A Single Community of Interest

My Government is calling upon Islanders to recognize that Prince Edward Island is a single community of interest, where essential services like health care and education are provided according to regional and provincial needs, and where there must be efficient and reasonable utilization of resources if all Islanders, regardless of where they live, are to be served equitably.

We simply cannot afford to do otherwise.

This kind of broader thinking was demonstrated last year by the parents of schoolchildren in eastern Kings when they unselfishly and wisely chose quality education over maintaining smaller local schools that could never have offered their children the same educational opportunities.

My Government believes that as individuals and families we have important choices to make, and that we have a unique opportunity in both education and health care especially, to re-shape our delivery systems to serve a changing province.

The Strength of Rural Communities

The heritage and identity, and much of the economic strength of the Island is to be found in our rural communities, and my Government is committed to the continued growth and prosperity of rural Prince Edward Island. But all of us share this place together, and I strongly believe we need to embrace our larger collective mission.

It is time to act and think more as one Island community, and unite in making it a stronger, better place to live.

The Role of Government

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

My Government has been fully engaged since June of last year managing the public affairs of the province, responding to crisis situations in agriculture and health care, putting our public finances in shape, and charting a new course.

It is clear that Government cannot, nor should it try, to do everything. Priorities and areas of involvement must be carefully chosen and limited resources used prudently.

Over the coming year, my Government will act in the best Liberal tradition by helping, guiding and representing, reforming, and by shining the light on possibilities and future opportunities.

Strategic Priorities

The action plan my Government will implement has very clearly defined strategic priorities:

- ☐ Together with Islanders, we will build a sustainable, integrated **health care** system, one that shifts emphasis and culture toward wellness and primary care, placing patients, the community as a whole and sustainability above all considerations.

- ☐ In **public education**, we will create a contemporary system which pursues academic excellence, focusing investment on learning rather than bricks and mortar, a system which honestly adjusts and responds to the new demographic realities.

- ☐ My Government will also define and implement a new **economic strategy** driven by innovation, productivity, sustainable diversification of traditional industries, and human resource development imperatives.

- ☐ My Government will advance **environmental stewardship** through modernized land use practices, sound conservation practices, renewable energy, regulatory integrity, and strategic infrastructure investments.

- ☐ And lastly, the **public service** will be modernized, enhancing service delivery models both internally and externally, addressing gender issues, improving accountability and comptrollership, and restructuring Government where necessary.

These are the strategic priorities of my Government, where Islanders can expect immediate action and change.

Our Health Care System

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

My Government is committed to building a health care system that truly meets the needs of every Islander.

Founded on that belief is my Government's goal to make certain that every Islander has both access to a family doctor, and a system that sensitively and compassionately addresses health care needs. I am proud of the fact that the number of physicians practicing on the Island has reached an all-time high.

Family Medicine Residency Program

Madame Speaker, our new Family Medicine Residency pilot program will begin this year, in preparation for a full program in 2009.

My Government is confident that a Residency Program will dramatically assist in the recruitment and retention of young physicians in the years to come. Although long overdue, a Family Medicine Residency Program will offer many more physicians the opportunity to practice on Prince Edward Island – and many of those individuals will choose to locate here. Additionally, my Government has secured new medical school seats which will improve the ability of young Islanders to pursue the goal of becoming a physician.

The new Office of Health Recruitment and Retention will focus on attracting physicians, nurses and other health professionals, permitting greater degree of flexibility in the delivery of health care.

Accelerated Nursing Program at UPEI

My Government understands that an evolving health care system will depend to a much greater degree on the talents and skills of the nursing profession. Consequently, an Accelerated Nursing Program at the University of Prince Edward Island will be implemented this year and will result in the graduation of an additional 35 nurses over the next two years.

Elimination of Air Ambulance Fees

In addition to improving the level of human resources dedicated to health care, my Government also is aware of the financial demands often placed on Islanders. For this reason, user fees for Air Ambulance and out-of-province ambulance transfers will be eliminated.

Other immediate steps to enhance health care services include:

- additional resources for **Patient Safety** initiatives to reduce adverse events within hospitals;
- the development and implementation of a much more rigorous **Infection Prevention and Control Program**;

- ☐ preparation of a new **Long-Term Care and Community Care Strategy** which will respond to growing needs of an aging population, both in terms of services and infrastructure;

- ☐ rapid implementation of the **Youth Addictions Strategy**, and the adoption of family, community and facility-based solutions;

- ☐ a contribution of $9 million to the **Queen Elizabeth Hospital Foundation** to support that group in its plan to purchase the most up-to-date medical equipment possible;

- ☐ development with the community of a new **Tyne Valley Health Centre;**

- ☐ establishing a new **Palliative Care Home Drug Program** so that many Islanders may enjoy the comfort and dignity of staying in their communities and with their families as long as possible;

- ☐ expanding the use of **nurse practitioners** in the health care system;

- ☐ exploring the idea of allowing **pharmacists** to renew patient prescriptions for routine medications; and

- ☐ the hiring of a **patient navigator** to support Islanders battling cancer.

My Government understands that many of these initiatives must be acted upon as quickly as possible.

Like so many other facets of our society, our potential strength in health care lies in meeting the challenge of working together. The long-range goal must be a health care system that embraces and integrates the services and programs which Islanders depend upon.

By placing the needs of Islanders at the very centre of the health care system, my Government believes this will focus our effort to build a culture that prizes wellness and primary care above all other considerations.

The health care community is strong, and my Government will contribute to that strength by fostering a system that truly works together on behalf of our entire community.

A new **Health Promotion Strategy** will be developed with full public engagement to focus my Government's efforts to build a healthier Island.

Planning the Future of Our Health Care System

Our health care system needs immediate improvements; and as you can see, my Government is taking action. However, we also must consider the long-term future and sustainability of the system. Therefore, much-needed improvements will be made while simultaneously reviewing current operations and developing deeper plans to modernize and integrate the system as a whole.

Reaching Out to Families and Seniors

My Government is committed to building a system of services, supports and programs for families and seniors that is comprehensive, equitable and timely, and delivered with respect and dignity.

We will do this by:

- ☐ building ongoing partnerships and carrying out inclusive consultations with Islanders, as demonstrated by our affordable housing review, *Child Protection Act* review, disability services review, and work of the Seniors Secretariat;

- ☐ continuing the Seniors Emergency Home Repair Program after its unfortunate cancellation;
- ☐ developing an integrated approach to helping high-risk youth;
- ☐ improving access to services for the working poor by raising the income threshold for the Family Health Benefit and extending dental services for young adults; and
- ☐ working in partnerships with parents to ensure protection and legal adoption practices for children entering our country through international adoption programs.

Public Education

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Our Island has a rich and distinguished history of pioneering and revolutionary developments in education. In 1852, Liberal Premier George Coles introduced one of the first public education systems in British North America.

We believe the next logical step in this evolution of public education is to bring kindergarten into the school system. My Government is committed to achieving this during the current mandate, following a thorough, careful and sensitive consultation process.

Public Kindergarten

My Government recognizes the importance of the early childhood years, and applauds the professional efforts of early childhood educators who support families with their knowledge, talents and commitment. Our transition to full public kindergarten will be undertaken in partnership with the early childhood education community.

My Government stands firm in its commitment that every child deserves the best start in life. Therefore, we applaud the Chances Best Start Program which helps children and families. In recognition of Government's commitment, funding for this program will be expanded to include children from 18 to 24 months in 2008-2009.

Unquestionably, Prince Edward Island must do more to offer Island children the best possible education so that their inherent talents and abilities are able to flourish and thrive.

Elimination of Student Fees

My Government also understands that programs offered by our schools should be equitably available to every Islander. On the basis of that understanding, my Government will begin to eliminate student fees for curriculum-based activities. This measure will remove any potential impediments to families who only want the best for their children.

Expand School Breakfast Program

Further, my Government recognizes the importance of a healthy diet for learning. Many volunteers and educators have worked tirelessly to establish 50 breakfast and nutrition programs across our Island. My Government will support this dedication to the health and well-being of young Islanders by introducing additional supports for breakfast programs in Island schools.

Literacy Skills in School and at Home

My Government will also enhance family literacy projects, which have proven to be very successful over the last year. The Spring Into Reading program brings families together by helping parents to become more engaged in the literacy skills of their children. Similarly, my Government is proud of the progress made in schools to help ensure that every Island child has an opportunity to learn. As part of my Government's new Learning Disabilities Strategy now in development, our speech language pathologists will help children in grades two to six with language and literacy challenges.

My Government also applauds the ambitious progress that is being made by primary teachers to help Island children develop much stronger literacy skills in the early grades.

International Baccalaureate Program

This year, the Student Achievement Action Plan will include the addition of four new literacy coaches in Island schools. The success of the program will help to guide potential new initiatives in early numeracy. Another important initiative under the Student Achievement Action Plan is the introduction of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program.

The Knowledge Economy

Madame Speaker, we believe strongly that Prince Edward Island's greatest resource is its people.

New Economic Development Strategy

For that reason, my Government will invest significant energy and resources in a determined effort to strengthen our economy, and the capacity of Islanders to prosper in a changing and dynamic world. During this session of the Legislative Assembly, my Government will table a major new strategy to guide economic development and higher education for the next five years.

This strategy will integrate an aggressive new approach to emerging industries like biotechnology while simultaneously providing enhanced educational opportunities for Islanders.

Working together, and marshaling our strengths as a united and determined Island province, my Government believes that an exciting economic renaissance lies within our grasp.

Although the participation of the Federal Government is both desired and welcomed in this mission, my Government is confident that its plans will succeed because of its unshakeable belief in the imagination, talent and drive of Islanders.

George Coles Student Bursary

In keeping with that faith in Islanders, my Government will dramatically ease the ability of young Islanders to enter the University of Prince Edward Island. The new George Coles student bursary will provide $2,000 to every student in their first year of study, along with assistance in subsequent years, making first degree tuition costs at our university by far the lowest in the Maritime region.

A similar program will be available to students of Holland College and Société Éducative de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard in 2008.

As more and more Islanders acquire the knowledge, and develop the skills and training so necessary in our changing world, my Government will increasingly focus its energies on laying a new and innovative foundation for our economy.

By helping young Islanders to succeed and prosper in this changing world, by placing faith in them, all of us will succeed, and our province can become a leader in imaginative and effective economic and educational progress.

Environmental Stewardship

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Prince Edward Island is the most densely populated province in Canada. We have little public land, few areas of unspoiled wilderness and an industry-driven working landscape. The pressures on our natural environment are great, and protecting the quality of water, air and soil, along with the integrity of the landscape itself, presents an ongoing challenge for all of us.

My Government is ready to meet this challenge.

Task Force on Nitrates and Drinking Water

Late in its electoral mandate, the previous Government recognized, as did the Official Opposition at the time, the vital importance of protecting the Island's drinking water. Then Premier Binns established a Task Force led by retired Justice Armand DesRoches to assess nitrate contamination of our groundwater resources, and upon taking office my Government quickly re-affirmed its mandate.

The Task Force has completed its research and consultations and will present a final report on June 1, 2008. In the interests of quick action, the commission did make interim recommendations to Government, and in response a series of highly successful mobile nitrate clinics were held across the province.

My Government awaits the final report of the Premier's Task Force on Nitrates, and the opportunity to take further action to protect the quality and quantity of our most vital natural resource.

Environmental stewardship is both an individual and community responsibility, and my Government is committed to working in partnership with Islanders to achieve our collective goals. Extreme weather events combined with current land use practices have put our streams and river systems in danger.

Stronger Buffer Zone Regulations

During this session the *Environmental Protection Act* will be amended and new buffer zone regulations implemented. But stronger regulations and punitive measures are not the long-term answer. My Government believes it is preferable to work collaboratively and constructively with our farmers, landowners and community groups to bring about the changes we require.

Watershed Management and Planning

My Government is committed to community based watershed management and planning where landowners develop and agree on a plan to enhance and protect the environment in their watershed. These plans, focusing on drinking water and surface water quality, soil erosion, and wetlands and natural areas, will then be supported by Government under a new Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program.

This innovative program, already a success in rural Ontario and other jurisdictions, will compensate landowners who manage their property in a way that supports the public good by providing ecological goods and services such as clean air and water.

In related areas, my Government is working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through implementation of a new Climate Change Action Plan, an Air Quality Health Index to inform the public about the level of outdoor air pollution, and introduction of new standards for forest management on public land and private land that receives public funding.

Centre for Climate Change Research

Madame Speaker, our vulnerability to climate change represents a unique opportunity for research and development of adaptation strategies, particularly with respect to coastal erosion and water management issues. As a result, my Government will again assume a leadership role in the development of progressive environmental initiatives, as we did with Waste Watch and the Canadian Wind Energy Institute, by establishing a Centre for Climate Change Research in west Prince. The scientific research produced by this facility will not only be important to Prince Edward Island but also to other coastal jurisdictions.

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Beverage Containers

My Government also will begin implementation this spring of a new provincial deposit refund system for all ready-to-serve beverage containers except for dairy products, replacing the existing system for refillable soft drinks. A portion of the revenue from deposits will be directed into new environmental initiatives.

Wind Energy Development

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Prince Edward Island has become an international leader in wind energy research and development, and already two commercial wind farms are operating at opposite ends of the province.

Increased Wind Generation Capacity

My Government in collaboration with Maritime Electric Company, Limited and potential wind developers will develop up to 500 MW of wind generation capacity in the province over the next five years.

The necessary transmission infrastructure will be established by Government and Maritime Electric. Indeed, the province in collaboration with West Cape Wind Energy Inc. will install a 200 MW transmission line from Maritime Electric's Sherbrooke substation to facilitate commercial wind development in west Prince.

Furthermore, in the coming year my Government plans to introduce, in collaboration with Holland College and the Federal Government, the first-ever Wind Energy Technician Program.

The Right Tools for the Job

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Re-aligning Government Departments and Agencies

Any trades person will tell you that without the right tools for the job at hand there is little chance of success. Certainly, that is true with the machinery and structure of Government. Unless ministries, departments and administrative units are structured and organized to reflect the priorities of Government – unless they are appropriate for the job – it is difficult to implement any agenda.

My Government has now carried out a full organizational review, and the first results of this review already are evident.

A new **Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning** replaces the former Department of Development and Technology and is comprised of a new Crown corporation to be known as Innovation PEI; Higher Education; a new Human Resource Development Agency designed to integrate all Government efforts associated with learning, population, training and skills development; and the PEI Lending Agency.

A new **Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development** will place a greater emphasis on advancing community development in rural Prince Edward Island.

And a new **Department of Education and Early Childhood Development** will bring new energy and focus to the educational development of our children.

Re-organizing Government to be an effective instrument of public policy, programs and services is a necessary task. It is not about making Government larger or smaller, but rather making it more relevant and responsive to the needs of Islanders.

Madame Speaker, Islanders are fortunate to have a dedicated and professional public service. My Government is committed to making it even better, by moving to a full merit-based system in the staffing of civil service employees, introducing a new Management and Leadership Development Program, building progressive succession plans, and by further enhancing staff training and development.

Public Service Modernization

A Government With More Than One Home

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Government Departments Re-located

One Island Community: One Island Future is more than a slogan. It is my Government's genuine commitment to provide quality services to all Islanders, wherever they choose to live. But it also means that the administrative engine of Government can find more than one home. Technology permits such decentralization, and my Government is prepared to act in this regard.

As a result, the new Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development will be headquartered in Montague.

The new Department of Innovation and Advanced Learning will be located in Charlottetown.

And the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will make its home in Summerside.

Planning for this historic and unprecedented decentralization of Government administration has already commenced and the two major re-locations of departments will be completed by 2010.

Rural Communities

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Thousands of Island families choose to live in rural communities. For many it is their generational heritage and the land and sea their livelihood. Each and every Island community strengthens our province, just as the pride of every single Islander contributes to the strength of our unique identity.

In an effort to further strengthen smaller rural communities, the Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development will develop a new Rural Economic Development Strategy. The department will help bring a rural, small-community focus to overall Government policy development.

Rural Economic Development Strategy

A first initiative will be the provision of high speed Internet services to all areas of rural Prince Edward Island.

Agriculture and the Fishery

Both farming and fishing have faced many challenges – some of which have stretched back for many years.

My Government appreciates the toughness and commitment of our Island farmers and fishers, and wherever possible my Government will support that resilience and energy with resources and action.

Over the past number of months, our Island has rallied behind farmers and fishers by demanding local products, and my Government will reinforce that sentiment with an aggressive Buy PEI campaign.

Buy PEI Campaign

Further, the Department of Agriculture's mandate will be sharpened to focus on the advancement of sustainable diversification, and producers will enjoy the support of my Government as they explore new products and means of production.

My Government has worked diligently to cope with destructive global market forces in an effort to assist our pork and beef producers. We have provided more than $12 million in grants and loan relief to hog producers, as well as $3 million to beef producers, and in the beef sector my Government was able to leverage the support of three other governments in putting the Atlantic Beef Plant on a more stable footing.

Supporting Beef and Hog Producers

Additional actions will be taken.

- ☐ Financial and technical support will be made available to help farmers comply with new requirements under the *Environmental Protection Act*.

- ☐ My Government will strengthen its support for risk management programs that help to protect producers against losses over which they have no control.

- ☐ Given the potential importance of the Federal Government to agriculture support, my Government will continue to work closely in the development of a new national agriculture policy framework for Canada. The completion of a new federal-provincial agreement will support provincial priorities in the areas of risk management, food safety and quality, the environment, innovation and competitiveness.

Low-interest Loan Program for Fishers

In the fisheries and aquaculture sector, my Government was very pleased to offer a low-interest loan program for lobster fishers hurt by low catches and escalating costs. The first-ever program of its kind in our province, it has eased the burden for many Island families who depend upon the fishery for their livelihood.

Lobster Initiative

In further support of the lobster fishery, my Government will proceed with a four-year Lobster Initiative, which will include:

- ☐ enhanced resource monitoring programs;

- ☐ continued efforts with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and industry to explore lobster licence rationalization, particularly in the Northumberland Strait;

- ☐ development of a Coastal-Ocean Policy for Prince Edward Island;

- support for harvesters and processors to examine eco-certification of Island lobster and help to better position our world-renowned resource in the global market; and

- assistance to the processing sector to examine and resolve issues around labour shortages, improvements to automation and training.

Madame Speaker, my Government will also establish a round table to ensure that the views and concerns of the lobster industry are always front and centre in policy discussions and decision-making.

Aquaculture Development

In other areas of the fishery, my Government will develop a new Mussel Aquaculture Productivity Initiative, and an Oyster Development Plan.

Tourism

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Every year the Island is made richer, not only economically but also socially and culturally, by the thousands of visitors who come here to experience our unique natural beauty and way of life.

My Government values tourism as an important industry and will seek to improve our province's ability to attract visitors.

Integrated Tourism Solution

The Department of Tourism, in collaboration with the Tourism Advisory Council, will develop a new marketing and sales approach based on sound research.

The department also will implement a new Integrated Tourism Solution which will offer a competitive advantage to our province.

This system will provide operators with a new centralized reservation system, afford Tourism PEI with the means to capture and analyze data, and make it easier for operators to communicate with the department.

We believe that it is a system absolutely ideal for a jurisdiction the size of Prince Edward Island, and will help the industry to maximize its advantages in a competitive world.

Land Use and Municipal Governance

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

There is a critical link in our province between municipal and land use and development issues. My Government is committed to the progressive future development of our cities, towns and villages, within the framework of compatible provincial policy and regulatory structure.

Commissioner on Land and Local Governance

My Government will appoint a Commissioner on Land and Local Governance to conduct a comprehensive review of municipal and land use and development issues. This commission will report in 2009.

The commissioner will also be asked to ensure that recommendations involving changes to responsibilities and expenditures will include recommendations on revenue measures needed to support such changes. Further, the commissioner will be asked to provide an opinion on the impact of unincorporated areas on existing municipal structures.

My Government wishes to emphasize that any future amalgamation of communities will only follow a mutual recognition of the merits of regional co-operation and integration.

Culture and Heritage

A society which has a strong sense of its collective past and values is better prepared for its future. My Government strongly believes that by strengthening our cultural knowledge and pride in our Island that our identity will be even further enhanced.

That sense of Island identity is extremely important in a rapidly changing world. It will help moor us to our past while permitting us to embark on an inspired new future.

To this end, my Government will:

- ☐ begin implementation of the current Provincial Heritage Review;
- ☐ begin the development of an Island studies course for inclusion in our school system;

Island Studies

- ☐ increase our knowledge of the Island's past through increased support to archaeological research in the province;
- ☐ strengthen our cultural industries by supporting the artisans and artists who lend so much to the evolving Island identity; and
- ☐ recognize the vital contribution of Island seniors to our cultural landscape by calling upon many to contribute their experience to the visual arts, story-telling, oral history, performance, literary arts and other areas. To that end, discussions have already been held with a seniors' organization to begin the co-ordination of this cultural engagement project – which will provide lasting benefits to future generations.

My Government also recognizes that our library system is not only a repository of knowledge but also a living part of the Island's culture and an important tool in contributing to the overall task of improving provincial literacy levels.

For those reasons, my Government will:

- ☐ increase the acquisitions budget of libraries to meet current needs and standards across both the region and the country;
- ☐ better equip libraries to address specific literacy programming needs; and
- ☐ over time, increase library programming and hours of operation.

L'Acadie

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The Acadian Deportation

2008 will mark a tragic anniversary on Prince Edward Island, because 250 years ago saw the beginning of the infamous Acadian Deportation.

It is estimated that 3,100 people were deported from their Island home, and about 1,700 lost their lives.

My Government salutes the Island's Acadian community for commemorating this historic human tragedy, while at the same time celebrating the present.

During its current mandate, my Government will adopt a proclamation schedule for a full *French Language Services Act*, and a joint Government/community committee will work together to create a long-term plan for the development of the Acadian and Francophone community.

The First Islanders

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Canada-PEI Mi'kmaq Partnership Agreement

On December 1, 2007, the Government of PEI signed the Canada/PEI Mi'kmaq Partnership Agreement. In recognition of our shared commitment flowing out of this agreement, my Government has initiated a project to define the role and function of Aboriginal Affairs within the Department of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour, so that we may meet the needs of our Mi'kmaq Government partners and the broader Aboriginal community on Prince Edward Island.

Further, my Government has taken action to support and increase the resources available to the Prince Edward Island Aboriginal Sport Circle to contribute to efforts regarding the development of healthy Aboriginal communities.

My Government has also implemented a plan in partnership with our Mi'kmaq partners to deliver on the expectations under the Aboriginal Social Housing Trust which will result in improved off-reserve Social Housing for Prince Edward Island Aboriginal citizens.

In recognition of the immediate unmet infrastructure needs on-reserve, and in recognition of the economic contributions of our First Nation reserves to our Provincial Economy, my Government has established a short-term Roads Program through Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour to move toward raising the standard of roads and transportation infrastructure on-reserve to the standard enjoyed by all Island communities.

Law Enforcement

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

My Government is pleased that the Federal Government is investing new dollars into law enforcement, which will result in funding for as many as six new police constables on the Island. This will complement the provincial decision to fund five new Royal Canadian Mounted Police constables for street level drug enforcement in the past two years.

Additional Policing

My Government will also introduce new amendments to the *Police Act* in the coming months. Permanent funding will be provided under the authority of the new act to pay the cost of regulated training and other standards for police. A new director of Policing Services will be retained to assist in the development of standards. Furthermore, a fair and appropriate civilian oversight process will be initiated by the fall of 2008, and a Code of Conduct will be included in the act.

Our Island Democracy

Madame Speaker, Islanders take their democratic responsibilities very seriously. In the most recent provincial general election, the voter turnout was nearly 84 per cent, the highest percentage turnout in Canada. In contrast, only 48 per cent of Albertans voted in their recent general election, and closer to home only 68 per cent in New Brunswick. At the municipal, provincial and federal levels Islanders are politically engaged.

My Government believes it is time to give the people of our province more certainty with respect to elections, and amendments to the *Election Act* will be tabled in this session fixing the date for future provincial general elections.

Fixed Election Dates

My Government values greatly the work carried out by all members in this Chamber on behalf of the people of our province, and that is why additional research and committee resources were provided to the Legislature last year. It also is my Government's view that the role of the MLA is changing. My Government will propose that a Special Committee be established to study and review the role and responsibilities of members.

Role of the MLA

It is an occasional aberration of our political system that every so often one party secures a massive majority, leaving the other parties with marginal representation. Both major political parties have experienced this difficult situation, and yet the role of the Official Opposition is essential. My Government will be proposing that operating grant funding to the Office of the Official Opposition be increased in recognition of this parliamentary role.

Public Engagement

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The successful shaping and implementation of public policy hinges on forthright, informed public engagement and dialogue. My Government will establish an Office of Public Engagement to provide ongoing assistance and co-ordination to the policy consultations of departments.

Public Engagement

Its mandate will also be to build a common foundation of knowledge and information from which both Government and communities can assess and discuss public policy issues. Utilizing the Community Accounts system developed by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and with the assistance of groups such as the PEI Quality of Life Coalition, my Government will strive to ensure that public engagement and dialogue is not just crisis driven but an ongoing and constructive process.

Island Pride

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Earlier in this speech, I spoke about the need for all Islanders to view their province as one community, to unite with purpose and enthusiasm around the institutions, traditions and shared qualities that define us. The stronger our sense of homeland and collective identity, the better equipped we will be to face the future.

My Government is committed to breathing new life into our Island identity and spirit.

To afford everyone an opportunity to celebrate family and community, my Government will declare the second Monday in February of each year as a new public holiday – Islander Day.

Islander Day

Madame Speaker, perhaps the most powerful symbol of our Islandness is the red shoreline that embraces us.

During this Session my Government will introduce legislation guaranteeing Islanders access and use of their shores and beaches as a legal birthright.

Shores and Beaches

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly, in addition to the measures already outlined, you will be asked to consider a number of legislative proposals including:

Beverage Containers Act
Domestic Relations Act
Smoke Free Places Act
Public Shores and Access Act
Pharmacy Act
Human Rights Act
French Language Services Act

Fellow Islanders, this year marks the centenary of the publication of Lucy Maud Montgomery's beloved *Anne of Green Gables,* unquestionably an international literary classic and the inspiration of millions around the world.

Lucy Maud loved her Island home.

In 1908 she wrote these words...

Fair Island of the sea
We raise our song to thee
The bright and blest
Loyally now we stand
As brothers, hand in hand
And sing God save the land
We love the best

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.